



Drawing Disaster

Manga Response to the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DRAWING DISASTER: MANGA RESPONSE TO THE GREAT EASTERN JAPAN EARTHQUAKE¹

GUNHILD BORGGREEN

In March of 2012 I was browsing through a bookstore in Tokyo, where one particular book—a manga book—caught my attention. Its cover (figure 1) is a drawing in colour depicting five men in work clothes and hard helmets pushing a train car on railway tracks. Snow-covered mountains appear in the background, snowflakes fill the air, and the men all clench their teeth in their joint effort and determination to move the train. On the left hand side of the image, the title of the book is displayed in yellow text: *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (Santetsu. Notebook on maps of Japanese railway travels. Documentary of the great earthquake disaster on Sanriku railway) by the manga artist Yoshimoto Kôji. The book, referred to from now as *Santetsu*, was published on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake that took place on March 11, 2011, and contains events of what happened on that particular day.²

The manga publication *Santetsu* relates to the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and points out central aspects of collective and embodied memory of an event that challenged Japanese society. The earthquake imposed a radical transformation in the life situation of hundreds of thousands of people directly affected by the earthquake, the tsunami and the nuclear incidents, as well as significant changes for the entire nation in terms of social, economic and political issues. In the first months after the disaster incident, all national, as well as international, attention and sympathy was directed towards the areas of catastrophe. However, the north-eastern Tōhoku region is a lowly populated and less affluent rural part of Japan, located in the periphery, far away from the highly populated metropolitan areas of Tokyo or the Kansai region. Hence, already a few days

after the earthquake and tsunami, critical voices in the public discourse were worried that as soon as the attention of disaster spectacle in the media would wear off, the disaster-stricken region would be left on its own to recover from the calamities. Critics were concerned that Japan's central government would not allocate the financial support necessary to rebuild infrastructure, industry, schools, hospitals, and other institutions, and that the region would never adequately recover from the aftermaths of the earthquake disaster, resulting in even further depopulation, increasing unemployment rates, and severe social and economical crisis. In other words, a disaster situation highlights some of the core issues in a political and ideological struggle between the national and local level of identity, involvement, and responsibility that take place continuously within the social and political structures of Japanese society.

The narrative in *Santetsu* locates the manga within the “do-not-forget-Tôhoku” part of this national versus regional power struggle. The story in *Santetsu* is wholly sympathetic to the people in the area who experienced the disaster, and the documentary style in the manga creates a profound effect in terms of the reader's identification. The narrative does not frame the characters in the story as victims, but emphasises collective agency through local initiatives to rebuild the railway. As the story takes a group of railway employees as the centre of attention, it also recounts an ideological discourse in terms of transport in Japan. Public transport in the form of local railway lines (such as the Santetsu line in the manga) is often in economic deficit and in need of public or private subsidiaries. Railways are therefore in danger of being closed down to give way to highways and the individualized means of transport provided by Japan's highly acclaimed car industry. Because car production became a national symbol of Japan's economic growth throughout the 1970s and 1980s, this dimension of local trains versus “nationalistic” cars seems to speak to a national-regional struggle as well.

In this chapter, I will locate a national versus regional struggle within the visual representations of the disaster. I will argue that the way in which the manga artist Yoshimoto deploys the medium of drawing provides a special set of visual technologies that challenges mainstream media images based on photography. I will bring forward some central points in the discussion of image and vision within the field of visual culture, and, through a close reading of *Santetsu*, point out how manga images perform agency and ownership, and thus create a potential for social and cultural change through local agency and activism. By relying on arguments from W.J.T Mitchell's notion of “drawing desire,” I approach manga as performative images, allowing for analyses of processes of coding as well

as action in drawing. These elements contribute to agency and ownership in terms of disaster, and my analyses show how manga partakes in addressing issues related to the discursive struggle of identity and solidarity between the national and the local.

Drawing and Desire in Visual Culture

The study of visual culture deals with images in a broad understanding of the concept. Many claim that contemporary society has become increasingly visual and argue for visual studies as a means to strengthen critical inquiry concerning power structures in social and political contexts. In the introduction to their book *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright claim that “our culture is an increasingly visual one,” and that this presents new challenges in “understand[ing] how images and their viewers make meaning.”³ Margaret Dikovitskaya defines visual culture as originating from the so-called “cultural turn” in the late 1980s, and she perceives visual culture as an encounter of art history, anthropology, film studies, and other areas within poststructuralist theory that focus on “the study of the cultural construction of the visual in arts, media and everyday life.”⁴ While parts of visual culture studies attend to the visual as representation formed by and embedded into linguistic systems of semiotic codes, a number of other academic approaches announced as the “pictorial turn” or “iconic turn” involve sensory, performative, and corporeal elements of the image, as well as the visual in relation to non-linguistic dimensions of imagination or a psychological *imago*. Others investigate characteristics of the visual with attention to the way in which images influence everyday life, not only through representation and visual discourse, but also in the particular way in which images possess agency and life.

In his 2005 book *What Do Pictures Want?* W.J.T. Mitchell discusses what it means to think about images as “alive.” According to Mitchell, the perception of the image as magical, embodied with a life of its own, cannot be dismissed as a reminiscence of ancient superstition of the past or “primitive” cultures of colonial anthropology. The notion of psychological or social power of the image thrives today, although in new forms and with other technological possibilities and social contexts.⁵ A paradox of double consciousness is manifest in how the notion of the image as alive and possessing desire and agency is often accompanied by a contradictory dismissal of such metaphorical designation. Mitchell does not ask what images mean or how they execute power; rather he focuses on the paradox of how the animated icon has become such a fundamental part of the

ontology of the image. Mitchell inquires about the relationship between agency and desire in images, hence asking, “what do pictures want?” In this context, Mitchell is particularly attentive to drawing as a type of image that reflects desire in a certain kind of reciprocity. According to Mitchell, William Blake’s didactics of desire and the “bounding line” defines and determines a boundary, but also “bounds” such enclosure by leaping over. For Blake, the drawn line “leaps across a boundary at the same time that it defines it, producing a ‘living form.’”⁶ Mitchell dwells on the verbal pun of the English word to draw, referring both to the act of tracing or inscribing a line, as well as to the act of pulling or dragging. To want something (or someone) is to try to pull or drag the object of desire closer. Thus, Mitchell claims, “drawing originated in love.”⁷

Mitchell refers to a scene containing the depiction of desire, in which the Maid of Corinth in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* draws the outline of the shadow of her lover on the wall in order to keep him present and “alive” after he has left the room.⁸ The image both becomes an icon and an index, both a resemblance of the object of desire as well as an indication of its previous but now vanished existence. A scene or a figure of desire may thus be depicted by drawing—that is, tracing and inscribing lines with a pen or other instrument. At the same time, the drawing itself—the act of pulling the instrument across the paper—becomes what Mitchell calls “the performance of desire.”⁹ In drawing, the artist performs an act of dragging or pulling an instrument, and the line itself performs an act of fixing a desire through boundaries. I will argue that this reciprocal performance of agency and desire in drawing is present in comics because of the prominent display of drawing as a basic visual and technical element: comics present not only drawing as image, but also drawing as action.

The Earthquake Disaster in an Anthropological Context

Two days after the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake, the events were designated as a “disaster of extreme severity,” *gekijin saigai*, by Japan’s Prime Minister at the time, Kan Naoto.¹⁰ Words such as “large earthquake disaster,” *daishinsai*, were also used by Japanese media, indicating a general consensus on the part of authorities to name the events a disaster. Dealing with “disaster” in a socio-cultural perspective, Isak Winkel Holm points out how sociologically informed disaster research in recent years has shifted focus from the cold war paradigm of a sudden and external atomic catastrophe to climate disasters of slow and less visible changes. Likewise, the conventional divide between natural disaster and man-made

disaster is challenged in recent discourse.¹¹ The March 11 disasters in Japan are described as both: while many maintain that the earthquake and the subsequent tsunami were natural events, others argue that the true disasters were man-made: neglects of historical knowledge concerning the range of tsunami waves in local areas along the coast, unsubstantiated trust in warning systems and flood prevention constructions, and insufficient security measurements in regards to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.¹²

In the introduction to the anthology *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman define disasters as a combination of a force from natural or built environments and a population in a condition of vulnerability, which leads to “a perceived disruption of the customary relative satisfaction of individual and social needs for physical survival, social order, and meaning.”¹³ Oliver-Smith and Hoffman point out that disasters are “totalizing phenomena” that subsume culture, society and environment. Emphasizing the holistic perspective of anthropology, they argue why it is important to study cultural dimensions of disasters: not only to investigate historical events of calamity, but also to be able to improve disaster management for catastrophes to come. Confronted with a threat of disruption, people are likely to recant or reinvent their cultural systems. According to Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, studying disaster may help explain how social processes and values are established:

Disaster exposes the way in which people construct or “frame” their peril [...], the way they perceive their environment and their subsistence, and the ways they invent explanation, constitute their morality, and project their continuity and promise into the future.¹⁴

In this regard, disasters and how they are perceived include processes of cultural and ideological adaptations such as innovation of social structures as well as world views and collective memory. “Ownership” of a disaster appears to be particularly contested as this includes not only the right to claim events as disaster in the first place, but also to define who the victims are, as well as accounting for origin, consequences and responsibilities of the disaster.¹⁵ A cultural perspective on disaster research may deal with how cultural products play a significant role in the formation of disaster consciousness, not just as a representation of the disaster, but as collective imagination that also constructs perceptions of “ownership,” including ways in which to project recovery and continuity into the future.

Mainstream Disaster Images

Following the March 11 earthquake, examples of how a certain type of disaster consciousness was formed in Japan might be seen in the visuality structured through images produced by Japanese mainstream media outlets. This is particularly significant in the dozens of picture magazines published by large newspaper companies in the months following the March 11 incidents, featuring images by news papers companies' photographers and photo journalists.¹⁶ The medium of photography in these magazines sustain the kind of realism that is commonly associated with news media and documentary because the camera is seen as a technology that captures whatever is in front of the lens when the shutter is released. This is what Roland Barthes calls an "analogical perfection."¹⁷ He argues that the effect of reality in photography emerges from a notion of a perfect mechanical analogue of reality, namely what is visualized on the photo must have existed or taken place in the real world at some moment in time. The reality effect is particularly relevant to the traumatic photograph, which is "wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene 'really' happened: *the photographer had to be there.*"¹⁸ This enhances the image as spectacle in terms of photographic depiction of disaster—as if to show that this terrible yet fascinating thing in the image actually happened.

Barthes, however, questions the convention of the press photograph as a message without a code, and points out the photographic paradox in which the coded (or connoted) message is based upon the un-coded message and is dependent on its status. In his text, Barthes lists a number of connotation procedures in which photographs may be at once both natural and cultural, and mentions syntax of serialized photos as one example: in a photo series, the signifier of connotation does not lie in each image alone, but in the concatenation of images.¹⁹ This is true for the images displayed in the picture magazines published in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake in Japan. The picture magazines in general have little text and convey their story in photographic imagery, many of them in a large scale that covers most of a full page or a double-page spread. All picture magazines are structured in similar manner: they begin with spectacular images that document the actual impact of the disaster, especially the tsunami, and in some cases a minute-by-minute chronological account of the tsunami or the impact of the waves at different locations along the eastern coast line.



Figure 2. Tsunami wave at Miyako city on March 11, 2011. Printed in *Morning Edition*, March 13, 2011. © Iwate Nipou.

One example is the image of the tsunami crashing over the protective wall along a main coastal road in the city of Miyako (figure 2). The photographer has managed to capture the image as black water pours over the wall and drags along some cars before splashing onto the road. This particular image has been reproduced in numerous news media because of its significant fixation on a very specific and spectacular moment of the disaster. The image looks like one of those rare “traumatic” photographs that Barthes suggests contain only denotation, but this is clearly not the case: the sheer number of times the image has been reproduced makes it highly symbolic. The picture magazines feature many images that show devastating consequences of the earthquake and the tsunami: the burned-out reactor buildings of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, houses and buildings destroyed, ships and boats lifted ashore, bridges and railways washed away, cars scattered around, and chaotic landscapes of debris.

After sections depicting destruction, the picture magazines all focus on rescue efforts and recovery: large sections are devoted to rescue work, and include images of the immediate rescue activities involving professional rescue workers, as well as images from evacuation centres and photos displaying emergency aid provided by volunteers. Numerous images convey



Figure 3. Page from *Yomiuri Shinbun* picture magazine. © *Higashi Nihon daishinsai*. *Yomiuri shinbun hōdō shashinshū*, Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbun Tōkyō Honsha, 2011.

organized lines of people waiting for food or water, queues for using telephones or charging batteries, or volunteers organizing boxes of food, equipment, clothes and other relief items. The magazines convey narratives about highly organized measures. They present order amidst chaos. An example of this is a page from *Yomiuri Shinbun* picture magazine (figure 3), which displays photographs of lines of patient victims tanking water or charging their mobile phones. Volunteers distribute warm soup, while local residents formulate slogans of encouragement on a blackboard. The only disturbing image is that of a small boy crying—but the emotion is consoled by the image below of a man and two boys reading a newspaper together.

Most of the picture magazines include images of the emperor and empress visiting evacuation centres at the disaster sites, as well as images that show how people all over Japan and throughout the world support victims by donating money or encouraging recovery. These picture magazines are examples of how certain types of imagery circulated in mainstream Japanese media convey a narrative of encouragement, recovery and national unity. Images of chaos are framed and contextualized by the accompanying pictures of organization and order. Because of the apparent denotation of photographic analogy, the picture magazines create a naturalized image of the historic and cultural significance of order. The notion of upheaval is soothed by images of momentary neatness, comforting not only victims of the current disaster that everyday life will be restored, but also consolidating the narrative of national preparedness for possible similar events in the future.

Manga as Ethnographic Inquiry

Many artists responded to the March 11 disasters, some as contributions to charity, while others engaged in artistic activism and civil society measures.²⁰ A large number of manga artists reacted immediately to the disaster by donating art works for charity and relief work, such as the book and exhibition entitled *Magnitude Zero*, which included illustrations by French bande dessinée and Japanese manga artists.²¹ Some manga publications addressing the March 11 incidents, including *Santetsu*, may be understood in light of normative narratives from mainstream media discussed above because they provide alternative and local memory of the events. As manga scholar Ryan Holmberg points out, there has been a number of different types of manga response to the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters, ranging from free online manga distribution in the inflicted areas to a reportage manga series by Suzuki Miso, which deals

with the challenges of Japanese manga industry after the earthquake and tsunami.²² Manga artist Shiriagari Kotobuki is highly acclaimed for his book entitled *Ano hi kara no manga* (Manga after 3.11), in which his daily four-frame manga strips from the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* are combined with longer stories previously published in monthly *seinen* (young adults) manga magazine *Komikku Biimu* (*Comic Beam*) and other places.²³

The manga publication *Santetsu* by Yoshimoto Kôji is a collection of five stories that were originally published in the monthly manga magazine *Komikku Banchi* (*Bunch Comics*), published by Shinchôsha, from December 2011 to April 2012. *Bunch Comics* is a magazine directed towards *seinen* (young adults) readership, which is in the age range of 15 to 40, and primarily male. As is common in the Japanese manga industry, serialized stories from weekly or monthly comic magazines that are popular among readers get published in books and thereby may reach broader audiences. In this case, the book includes additional material such as maps and charts with statistical material as well as a written conversation between Yoshimoto and non-fiction writer Ishii Kôta. As the word *kiroku*, record, in the full title indicates, *Santetsu* is a documentary style manga, or reportage manga. Yoshimoto visits the area about five months after the events, and conducts a kind of ethnographic study by interviewing local residents, visiting sites, and collecting photographs and other documents from the earthquake and tsunami incidents. *Santetsu* recounts, in five chapters, the events of March 11 as seen from the perspective of different people working at a small local private railway company, the Sanriku Railway Company. The five chapters present stories and eyewitness accounts of individuals at various localities along the railway line, and because several characters from one chapter appear again in others, the book presents a complex narrative structure.

In the first chapter, the manga artist introduces himself as Yoshimoto Kôji, a 38-year-old manga artist, who in August 2011 went by car to the disaster area of Iwate Prefecture in north-eastern Japan together with his editor Iwasaka Tomoaki to collect material (figure 4). This page shows how each frame is used to depict different viewpoints: the exterior of the car is seen in various sceneries and Yoshimoto and his companion are shown inside the car.

In the city of Miyako, Yoshimoto and his editor walk to the main office of the Sanriku Railway Company and meet with Tomite Atsushi, Head of Division for Passenger Service. Mr. Tomite is depicted en face at the top of the page, and his name and title are provided in a box to the left. Mr. Tomite is depicted as if he is recounting his story directly to the reader. “On



Figure 4. The manga artist arriving at Miyako with his editor. Yoshimoto Kôji, page from *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

that day, I was at work as usual...” The next frames show a flashback to March 11, beginning with a view of a small train model placed on a shelf, and presenting the daily routines of the passenger service office. Then suddenly, at 14:46, all mobile phones in the office set off at once as the mobile phone emergency earthquake news flashes become activated. The last image on the page shows Mr. Tomite on alert in those brief seconds between the warning system sounds and the actual earthquake begins. This anticipation is echoed in the reader, who has to wait for a brief moment while turning the page.

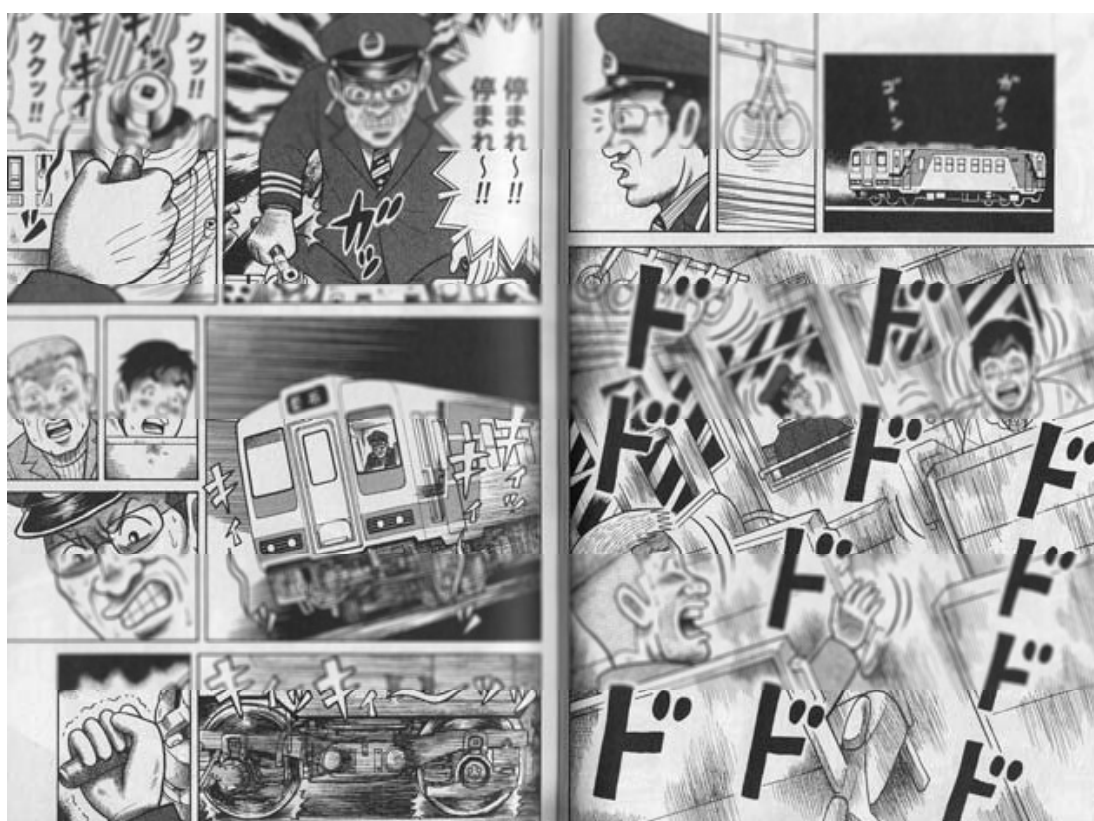


Figure 5. The train driver’s experience of the earthquake. Yoshimoto Kôji, page from *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

On the next page, most of the composition is devoted to a representation of the earthquake at the office, with large onomatopoeia letters spelling “do do do do do do do” to indicate the clatter of everything rattling. Below the large representation of the quake, the light pole outside the window sways violently from side to side with a “guwaan guwaan.”

Another flashback account of the earthquake incident, this time told by the train driver Yasumiishi Minoru, depicts the event from inside one of the Santetsu Railway Company's trains. The train was running through a tunnel when the quake occurred (figure 5). Here too large onomatopoeia letters of "do do do do do" are scattered across the image of the titling railway car in the right hand part of the spread. On the left hand side (the Japanese way of reading manga is from right to left, and from top to bottom) images from different perspectives depict the anxiety of the driver as well as of the two passengers as the driver desperately tries to stop the train. In another section of the book, a young female railway attendance recounts the sounds of the tsunami as the most terrifying and unforgettable element, and Yoshimoto draws in the onomatopoeia "kan kan kan" and "biii biii biii" when the bells at the railroad crossings and car alarms go off.

Drawing as "Performance of Desire"

In scenes visualising the impact of the earthquake, Yoshimoto depicts the event based on his imagination created through the verbal description by the person who experienced it. Through the act of drawing, the artist conveys an imaginary account of how it was to be right there, at that specific moment on that day. Yoshimoto applies a drawing style that is thorough and meticulous, as if to render all details of the accounts in a realistic manner. Especially significant is the extensive use of hatching throughout the book. The artist executes the hatchings as thin parallel lines or as criss-cross or other types of patterns to indicate light and shadow in space or on objects, and thus creates an illusion of three-dimensional representation as a way of enhancing realism. More importantly, these hatchings, as well as the painstaking details in almost every frame of the book, point out the endeavour of the handicraft performed by the artist. The demanding execution in the act of drawing displays Yoshimoto's commitment to capture and transfer all the scenery as it may actually have happened. The labour deployed in the drawing process is thus visible as what Mitchell calls "the performance of desire" when Yoshimoto pulls his pen across the paper thousands of times in the attempt to seize the situation.

This is particularly telling in scenes representing destruction, for example when two railway employees arrive by car to Shimanokoshi station only to find that everything has been swept away. Here Yoshimoto's elaborate outlines and hatching of scattered debris seem to suggest that despite this detailed visualisation, it is almost impossible to recognize the many destroyed objects as things from somebody's everyday life. Another example is the middle frame of figure 6, where the non-

fiction writer Ishii Kôta is surrounded by debris while he reflects upon how destructive the earthquake disaster was. In this image Yoshimoto's hatching becomes so condensed that the frame appears almost black. The images are thus not only representation; vision in this case does not merely translate into language or discourse. The drawings in *Santetsu* show how official narratives may be contested by establishing alternative "ownership" of the disaster: Yoshimoto produces these lines as a desire to render events and things as faithful to the accounts of the individuals who experienced them as possible. The lines perform a fixing of the artist's desire to keep "present and alive" the recollections and memories of the people involved.

Another significant scene in the book takes place on March 11 at Miyako town hall, a five story building close to the waterfront, on top of which a number of people are gathered due to the tsunami warning. From the rooftop they watch the disaster unfold on the streets beneath them. In the following spread, covering one and a half pages (figure 7), Yoshimoto visualizes the moment when the giant wave of black water pours over the all too low protection wall and spills into the streets and alleys of Miyako City, throwing about and crushing everything in its way. In three frames on the left hand side of the spread, the focus shifts from what could be seen from the roof top to a frontal image of the spectators' faces; rendered with signs of distress (drops of sweat, wide open eyes, and dark foreheads), the three men wonder where the people they just saw on the streets below have gone.

In this case, it seems likely that Yoshimoto has used the well-known and spectacular news photo (figure 2) to support his visualisation of the eyewitness accounts of the wave overflowing the wall. Yoshimoto reproduces a moment where two cars are washed over the edge, and the black water splashes on to the road. His careful and meticulous labor in drawing space and light, as well as all details as realistically as possible, may be understood as a way of enhancing the notion of documentary. In terms of representation, the drawing and the photo have visual resemblances, but also a number of dissimilarities: the angle and the viewpoint are not exactly identical, and Yoshimoto has included the horizon in his image. Also, where the black sea water appears relatively "flat" on the photo, the waves in Yoshimoto's drawing are steeper and more rigid. Most significantly, however, is the way in which Yoshimoto changes the structure of the visual message by reproducing the event as a drawing.



Figure 6. The writer Ishii in the midst of debris. Yoshimoto Kôji, page from *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.



Figure 7. Eyewitness accounts of the tsunami in Miyako city. Yoshimoto Kôji, page from *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

Although both the photograph and the drawing attempt to constitute a visual analogy to reality, the drawing has an additional dimension which refers to a system of significations called “art” by way of style, colour, format, composition, and other culturally embedded conventions. The drawing involves deliberation and aesthetic choice, and thus evades or transgresses the notion of objectivity so often associated with photography. On one level, the photograph of the black torrents of Miyako lends its reality effect to Yoshimoto’s drawing because many viewers already know the photo and thus create visual and emotional references to that particular moment of real life events denoted in the photograph. On another level, exactly because of this visual recognition, the aesthetic choices of style and form in Yoshimoto’s drawing point out and make clear how coded messages function, not only in the drawing, but also in the original photograph. The drawing transfers the notion of coding back to the photograph: to look at the drawing is to become aware of the photographic paradox inherent in the original image, and to realize that in photographs too, meaning is constituted through cultural conventions. Yoshimoto’s

meticulous labour in the act of drawing emphasizes this point of awareness because his artistic style imitates and exaggerates the apparent denotative realism of photography. The performance of desire in the act of drawing attains here yet another significance because it uncovers the processes of looking and making sense of what is seen.

Reconstruction

On the narrative level, *Santetsu* is a story of local activism. The first chapters recount the stories of what happened during the earthquake and tsunami impact as seen by various individuals employed by the Sanriku Railway Company. The following chapters focus on how groups of railway company employees recover and rebuild the railway. After the earthquake and tsunami many people would walk along the railway tracks as a means to navigate from place to place when familiar landmarks were destroyed. Notice boards featuring messages among local residents were placed along the tracks, and in this way, the railway maintained its function as line of communication, although differently than in normal daily life. This and other incidents encouraged a group of railway employees, on their own initiative, to decide to restore parts of the railway line that were damaged by the tsunami waves. After registering the degree of destruction along the route, the railway employees dedicated themselves to work on removing debris and cleaning the tracks, and they engaged personnel and machines from the Self-Defence Forces to help clear away larger objects and debris too heavy to move themselves. Only five days after the earthquake, the line between Kuji to Rikuchû-Noda was restored, and in the third chapter of *Santetsu*, Yoshimoto visualizes the celebration of the reopening of the 12 km railway line between Miyako and Tarô on March 20, after only nine days. Yoshimoto depicts the joy of both local residents and news reporters inside the train, while cheerful crowds wave to the train at a crossing. In the final image of the manga, Yoshimoto depicts one of the train drivers imagining the day will come where the train will run along the beautiful coastline of Sanriku.

Surely, the narrative in Yoshimoto's manga is highly symbolic, and recounts in straight forward images a story of recovery that may be seen as equally ideological as the narratives of national unity conveyed in the picture magazines discussed above. Yoshimoto, however, also includes issues of potential conflict, for example by referring to the sum of more than 10 billion Yen for the complete reconstruction of the entire Sanriku railway line. Local residents are quoted as saying that they would rather see such a large amount of money be spent on building roads and

highways, while others do not want to contribute to rebuilding railways through their taxes. In this way, Yoshimoto acts as an ethnographer who registers and transmits various ways of cultural and economic adaptations, which include innovation and persistence within social structures, cultural and historical memory, as well as ideological positions and world views.²⁴ Yoshimoto recounts the workplace organization of a small local railway company, the roles and relationships of employees, and how some of them lose their jobs when the railway is disrupted. In *Santetsu*, Yoshimoto reveals the vulnerability of the entire community when fundamental elements such as infrastructure are damaged, and thereby visualizes the social function of railway transport in rural locations in Japan in general, where railways are used primarily by school children and elderly people. Thus, *Santetsu* may be seen as addressing broader issues of power distribution and social and economic structures in Japanese society at large.

With *Santetsu* Yoshimoto demonstrates the potential power of manga in terms of cultural and social change. In his ethnographic approach, Yoshimoto collects the voices and visions of a group of people in a small rural community, who in the aftermath of catastrophe take matters in their own hands. The artist tells a story of human concern that frames the peril of disaster in a local context. In his desire to transmit the “true accounts” through the meticulous act of drawing, Yoshimoto balances images of representation on the verge of “reality” and “fiction,” between “documentary” as concept and “art” as style, thereby offering spaces for imagination that take place in real life situations but also transgress such notions. Yoshimoto’s drawings allow for agency in the way they represent images of local initiative and solidarity, based on shared experiences and collective memory of events. In Yoshimoto’s narrative, there are no victims because everyone in this story plays a role and performs an action. In this way, Yoshimoto contributes to the formation of “ownership” of the disaster by accounting and visualizing the origins, consequences, and responsibilities of the events as seen by railway employees and local residents.

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Notes

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for instructive comments on the first draft, as well as the editors for encouragement and patience. Japanese names are written in the Japanese manner with the family name preceding the given name, except when otherwise stated in non-Japanese references.

² In Japan, the expression *ano hi*, that day, refers to March 11, 2011, as a specific day in recent collective memory. On that day, at 14:46 local time, an undersea megathrust earthquake at magnitude 9.0 occurred about 130 km east of the city of Sendai on the north-eastern coast of Japan. The earthquake is officially known as *Higashi Nihon daishinsai*, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake. The earthquake was followed by over 800 aftershocks of magnitude 4.5 or more. “Japan Quake Map,” accessed May 18, 2012 at <http://www.japanquakemap.com/>. The earthquake set in motion a subsequent *tsunami*, a series of large waves caused by the displacement of water at sea, that hit the shores of the Tōhoku region of Japan about 30 minutes after the quake. In several places the tsunami was much larger than coastal security measures were prepared for, and entire villages and local communities were swept away by the forceful tide. It is estimated that more than 15,000 people were killed on March 11 due to the tsunami, and more than 7,000

were still missing after three months. “Estimated Number of the Disaster Victims,” Cabinet Office, last modified June 14, 2011, accessed September 10, 2012, <http://www.cao.go.jp/shien/en/2-count/annex1-1.pdf>. The earthquake furthermore triggered a severe nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which included a serious radiation release into the environment. The accident was later declared a Level 7 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. *Official Report of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission. Executive Summary*, National Diet of Japan, accessed September 10, 2012, http://naaic.go.jp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NAIIC_report_lo_res.pdf.

³ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

⁴ Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 1.

⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰ “Kan sôri kara no kokumin no minasama e no messêji” (Message to the people from Prime Minister Kan), Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, last modified March 13, 2011, accessed September 10, 2012, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/kan/statement/201103/13message.html>.

¹¹ Isak Winkel Holm, “Katastrofen i kulturen. Introduktion til kulturvidenskabelig katastrofeforskning” (Disaster in culture. Introduction to cultural disaster research), *Kritik* 194 (2009): 3-8.

¹² Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission released their report in July 2012 concluding that the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident was “clearly ‘manmade’” because “direct causes of the accident were all foreseeable prior to March 11, 2011.” *Official Report of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission. Executive Summary*, National Diet of Japan, accessed September 10, 2012, http://naaic.go.jp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NAIIC_report_lo_res.pdf.

¹³ Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman, “Introduction. Why Anthropologists Should Study Disaster,” in *Catastrophe & Culture. The Anthropology of Disaster*, eds. Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ The magazines consulted for this analyses are: *Higashi Nihon daishinsai: Renzu ga furueta. Sekai no fotogurafaa no ketteiban* (The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake Disaster: Shaking lenses. Final edition of collection of photos by world photographers) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2011); *Higashi Nihon daishinsai. Yomiuri shinbun hôdô shashinshû* (The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake Disaster. Yomiuri Shinbun news photo collection) (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbun Tôkyô Honsha,

2011); *Kinkyû fukkan Asahi Gurafu: Tôhoku Kantô daishinsai* (Emergency re-issue Asahi Graph: The Great North-East Japan and Kantô Earthquake Disasters) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2011); *Sandê Mainichi kinkyû zôkan: Higashi Nihon daishinsai* (Sunday Mainichi Emergency special edition: The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake Disaster) (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 2011); *Tokubetsu hôdô shashinshû: Higashi Nihon daishinsai* (Special news photo collection: The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake Disaster) (Kobe: Kobe Shinbunsha, 2011).

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image Music Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 15-31.

¹⁸ Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 30, italic in the original.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Fukuzumi Ren, "Shinsai igo no aato. Yanobe Kenji, Kônoike Tomoko, Hachiya Kazuhiko, Chim Pom" (Art after the earthquake disaster. Yanobe Kenji, Kônoike Tomoko, Hachiya Kazuhiko, Chim Pom), *Bijutsu techô* 63, 958 (October 2011): 100-110.

²¹ The illustrations were exhibited at Kyoto International Manga Museum on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the earthquake "Sekai no komikkusu gaka ga mita 3.11: Magunichûdo zero" (Magnitude Zero: 3.11 as seen by comic artists around the world), accessed May 20, 2012 at

<http://www.kyotomm.jp/event/exh/311m0.php>. The publication was a follow-up to the French book with the title *Magnitude 9. Des images pour le Japon*, published by CFSL Ink, 2011. Michiko Yoshida, "Top manga talents contribute to collection themed on March 11," *Asahi Shinbun*, accessed May 20, 2012 at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201203140007.

²² Ryan Holmberg, "Manga 3.11: The Tsunami, the Japanese Publishing Industry, Suzuki Miso's Reportage, and the One Piece Lifeboat," *The Comics Journal*, August 31, 2011, accessed May 12, 2012, <http://www.tcj.com/manga-3-11-the-tsunami-the-japanese-publishing-industry-suzuki-miso's-reportage-and-the-one-piece-lifeboat/>

²³ Shiriagari Kotobuki, *Ano hi kara no manga* (Manga after 3.11) (Tokyo: Enterbrain, 2011). Shiriagari's book *Ano hi kara no manga* won the Prize of Excellence at the 15th Media Art Festival (Media Geijutsu Matsuri) organized by the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs in 2012.

²⁴ Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, "Introduction," 9.

Chapter Thirteen

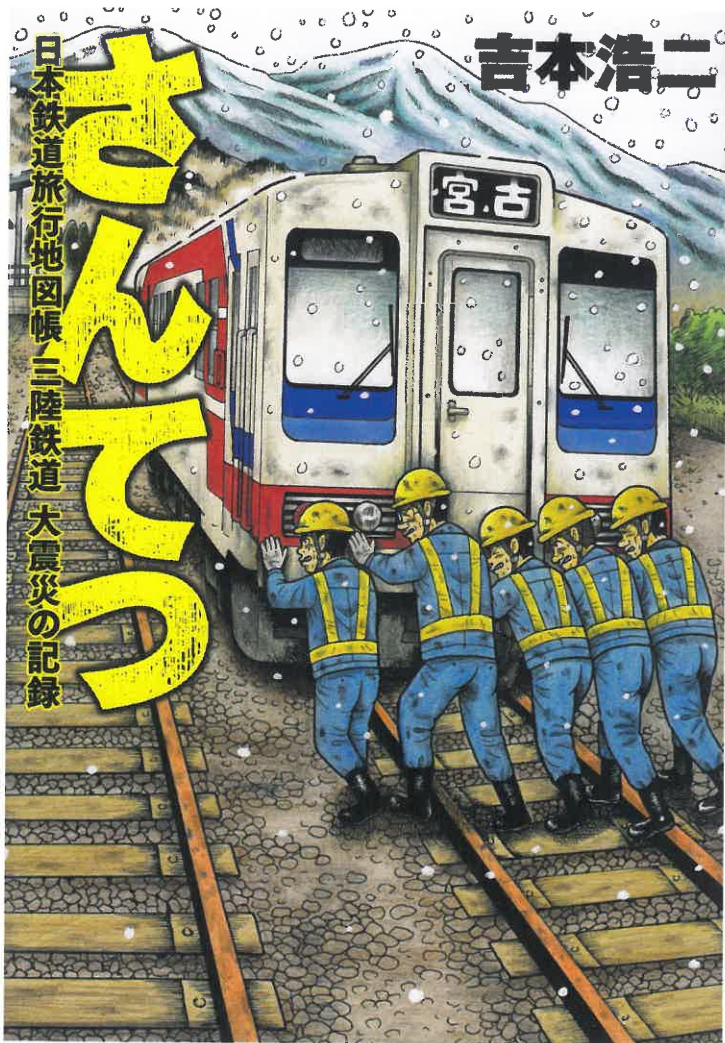


Figure 1. Yoshimoto Kôji, cover of *Sanretsu*. *Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012). © Kôji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha. The word *Sanretsu* is an abbreviation of *Sanriku Tetsudô* (Sanriku Railway), and it refers to the small private railway company operating along the coast of Iwate Prefecture in the northeastern part of Japan's main island of Honshû.

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